



**Winter 2011**

# Connections



Do you recognize this courthouse?  
See bottom of page 3.

## A Holiday Message from Chief Justice Robert P. Young, Jr.

Dear Colleagues in the Judicial Branch:

There is something about this time of year that encourages reflection, especially as to what we have done with the past year and how we might make fresh, and better, beginnings. The religious holidays—Christmas, Hanukkah, the Islamic New Year, and others—that occur close to year's end reflect this sense of both looking back and starting anew. For many people, this is a time to recall and renew our beliefs, and try to more closely order our lives with our faiths.

As members of the state judicial branch, one of our articles of faith, although a secular one, is that our justice system makes our constitutional republic possible. Without the courts, our system of ordered liberty could not exist. Each of you played a part this year in that important work.

We can also look back on a year in which our branch, for the first time in decades, spoke with one voice in support of much-needed reforms, including eliminating unneeded judgeships and making the best possible use of our resources, without adding to the taxpayers' burden. I am proud to be working with so many people who put public service and accountability first.

Whatever your faith, I wish you, and those dear to you, the very best. Please accept my thanks for another year of a job well done.

Robert P. Young, Jr.

## Meet Kelly Howard and Her “Small but Mighty” Child Welfare Services Team

Dubbed “small but mighty” by then-Justice Maura D. Corrigan, Child Welfare Services plays an important role in the way Michigan state courts deal with families and children in crisis.

Leading Child Welfare Services is Director Kelly Howard, who brings a wealth of experience in family law and policy to her work. Her passion for policy dates back to an early job as a legislative assistant for a congressman in Washington, D.C. who focused on judiciary and family law issues. In 1999, she took those skills to the Michigan Legislature, where she served as a policy advisor on family law issues – and began to work with her future boss, Trial Court Services Director Steve Capps, then of SCAO's Friend of the Court Bureau.

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## Meet Kelly Howard

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In March 2003, Ms. Howard joined the Friend of the Court Bureau as a management analyst primarily responsible for policy and legislative development. In 2008, she became the manager of the Child Welfare Services (CWS) Division; in 2009, she was promoted to director. Ms. Howard oversees three federal Court Improvement Program grants, each aimed at improving court policy and processes in cases involving at-risk children and families. She also oversees Michigan's Foster Care Review Board.

### ***Child Welfare Services – A Snapshot***

The CWS division includes two units: the Court Improvement Program and the Foster Care Review Board.



Standing L-R: Darla Brandon, Jenifer Pettibone, Kelly Howard, Maribeth Preston, Casey Anbender  
Sitting L-R: Jodi Latuszek, Heather Leidi, Andrew Santini (law clerk)



L-R: Patricia Jones (intern), Kathy Lohr, Kelly Robb, Earle Monroe, Jeanette Bridges, Jim Novell, Brenda Baker-Mbacke, Amanda Kucharek, Jacqueline Poindexter, Erinn Aldermann (intern)

A primary Court Improvement Program activity is convening a statewide child welfare task force, comprised of lawyers, judges, public and private agency workers, and administration officials. Task force committees address quality and depth of hearings, quality representation, policy, Child and Family Services Review, and tribal court relations; the task force recently added a data committee. These committees assess judicial processes, identify barriers to effective decision-making, and examine child welfare laws and court rules, all with the goal of achieving better outcomes for children. For example, the Quality and Depth of Hearings Committee recently issued a final report with recommendations for best practices for every hearing in a child protection proceeding. The Quality Representation Committee created and distributed a set of best practices bench cards for family court judges and attorneys who represent parents in child protection proceedings. And by encouraging collaboration among Michigan tribes, courts, the Department of Human Services (DHS), and other child welfare stakeholders, the Tribal Court Relations Committee helped draft the Michigan Indian Family Preservation Act, a Michigan version of the Federal Indian Child Welfare Act.

The Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) monitors children's treatment and safety in the foster care system. Manager James Novell manages the program, assisted by Program Representatives Brenda Baker-Mbacke, Jeanette Bridges, and Kellie Robb, and their assistants Kathy Lohr, Amanda Kucharek, Earle Monroe, and Jacqueline Poindexter. The FCRB program representatives train and manage 180 citizen volunteers statewide; these volunteers review randomly selected abuse and neglect cases of children placed in foster care. In addition to monitoring children's care and safety, volunteers identify and address barriers to children being placed in a safe, stable home in a timely manner. The FCRB also hears appeals by a foster parent or relative caregiver challenging an agency's decision to move children to another foster care placement. The FCRB publishes a report each year on the barriers to child safety, well-being, and timely permanency that FCRB members have observed over that year. The FCRB also recommends improvements in child welfare policy to the legislature, DHS, and SCAO.

### ***On the Agenda: CWS Projects***

CWS staff always have several major projects going at any given time. For example, in follow-up to the American Bar Association Report on Effective Parent Representation in Michigan (2009), Management Analyst Jenifer Pettibone began working with the Genesee County Family Court on a pilot program that would add a social worker to the parent attorney's legal team. This pilot program is based on national data showing that family reunification is more likely when the attorney has a social worker who can address barriers to family permanency.

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## Meet Kelly Howard

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Management Analyst Maribeth Preston staffs the Michigan Race Equity Coalition, chaired by Justice Mary Beth Kelly, with support from Casey Family Programs. Reports over the last decade consistently indicate that African American and Native American youth are overrepresented in Michigan's child welfare system compared to the general population. The coalition is working to identify the root causes and develop solutions to eliminate racial disparity in child welfare and juvenile delinquency matters.

Management Analyst Casey Anbender is responsible for coordinating the highly successful Adoption and Permanency Forums, co-sponsored by DHS Director Corrigan and Justice Mary Beth Kelly. The forums bring together multi-disciplinary teams from each county to find solutions for children awaiting permanency. In 2011, with assistance from 13-year SCAO veteran Darla Brandon, Ms. Anbender coordinated regional permanency forums in Grayling, Auburn Hills, St. Ignace, and Kalamazoo.

### ***Better Outcomes Through Training***

In addition to its policy workgroups, various committees, and special initiatives, the Court Improvement Program provides 20-25 trainings annually, thanks to a federal CIP training grant and additional funding from the Governor's Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect. CWS's newest Management Analyst, Jodi Latuszek, administers these multidisciplinary programs, which target judges, court staff, caseworkers, attorneys, and other members of the child welfare community; she is ably assisted by Heather Leidi, the program assistant for training. Most recently, Ms. Latuszek collaborated with the Foster Care Review Board's Jim Novell and Kathy Lohr to develop and host the first day of the annual FCRB training conference on "Achieving Placement Stability for Children in Foster Care." More than 300 members of the child welfare community, representing multiple disciplines, attended the conference.

Court Improvement Program training topics cover a wide range: representing parents in a child welfare case, appellate advocacy, testifying in court for non-lawyers, educational issues, family preservation, and specialized training for child welfare prosecutors and lawyer guardians ad litem. Each training aims to provide child welfare professionals with the tools they need to make decisions that promote child safety and improve permanency outcomes. This year, the training program seeks to provide more hands-on and skills-based training through collaboration with key stakeholders.

### ***The Future of CWS***

With a talented director at the helm and a knowledgeable and hard-working staff, "small but mighty" CWS will continue to promote fair and efficient policies and initiatives. Through enhanced data collection and sharing, CWS will be able to demonstrate that its ongoing hard work improves the court process, which inevitably leads to better outcomes for Michigan's children. ■



**Holiday greetings from the Connections Team and all of us at the State Court Administrative Office.**

[Click here to enjoy a little Jingle Bell Rock!](#)



# Technology for a User-Friendly Court

*By The Honorable William G. Kelly  
Chief Judge, 62A District Court, Kentwood*

You've heard about user-friendly computers -- now, thanks to technology, we can also have user-friendly courthouses. The 62B District Court in Kentwood, which opened in 2002, uses technology to improve the ways cases are handled, free up staff time, and make the experience easier and more efficient for all concerned.



When visitors arrive at the courthouse, they are greeted by a plasma screen monitor that displays the court schedule and other notices. Those seeking information from court files go to a file review room where they can look up court files by computer and copy what they need.

The courtroom's evidence presentation system features monitors in front of the attorneys, witness, jurors, judge, and gallery, as well as at the podium. Images from the judge's and attorneys' computers, and from other sources such as a document camera or DVD, can be quickly and clearly displayed on the monitors for everyone to see.

The presentation system allows the court to reinforce oral communications with visual displays -- for example, advice of rights is done via slide show, with the judge advising the defendant of his or her rights as the words are displayed on the monitor. To accommodate those with limited English proficiency, the slide shows are also available in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Bosnian -- the largest non-English-speaking populations in the Kentwood area. These slide shows are used in misdemeanor arraignments, guilty pleas, and probation violation hearings; they are also used to advise parties of their rights and procedures in small claims and landlord tenant cases.

The court also uses a word processor to provide additional information concerning the particular case. For example, in an arraignment, monitors display the direct and collateral consequences for the offense for which the defendant is charged as the judge reviews them with the defendant. If a defendant pleads not guilty to driving with a suspended license, the court prepares a document in seconds, using macros, to show the defendant what he or she must do to clear the suspensions. When sentencing a defendant to probation, the terms of probation appear on the monitors as the judge pronounces sentence; a copy of the judgment of sentence is printed and given to the defendant before he or she leaves the courtroom.

The audio/recording system also uses technology to improve the administration of justice. Wireless microphones for the attorneys and in the gallery are tied into the audio/recording system, allowing for good sound recording from everywhere in the courtroom. Attorneys are not required to stand in front of a microphone because the microphone is attached to the attorney. A telephone system is connected to the audio system for amplification and recording; all the courtroom microphones are connected to this telephone system. Among other things, this system allows staff to contact "Language Line," a commercial interpretation provider, to locate foreign language interpreters for non-English-speaking defendants. As a result, the court can obtain a qualified interpreter promptly, avoiding inconvenience to both the court and the defendant, who would otherwise have to return when an interpreter was available.



Transporting prisoners from the jail to the courthouse involves time, expense, and security risks, but with the court's video conference system, arraignments take place by video as the prisoner remains at the county jail. The video conference system can also connect with the prison system and with the state police laboratory. Hearings involving prisoners

take place without the cost, and loss of time, involved in transportation, and state police experts can spend minutes testifying by video instead of wasting hours driving to hearings.

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## Technology

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Traffic tickets are handled smoothly, and without a staff person, thanks to an e-citation system. The police department issues tickets on a computer; the data is downloaded to the court's computer soon afterward, and the defendant can pay the ticket shortly after that. This e-citation system saves clerical time.

In the near future, the court's website will allow defendants to pay their tickets online. When that happens, the defendant will be able to pay within hours after receiving the ticket, even on the weekends. Court staff will not be involved at all: the information will be downloaded to the system automatically, the fines and costs will be paid over the Internet, the abstract will be sent automatically to the Secretary of State, and the case will close automatically.

Courts and court staff may contact me at 616-554-0717 if you have questions. ■



## “Out of Home Placement” Questions Addressed at SCAO Symposium

*By Daniel Bauer, Management Analyst*

When an abused or neglected child is removed from his home, that child is going to have lots of questions: “Who will care for me? Where will I sleep tonight? Will I ever see my mom and dad again?” Placement workers answer these questions the best they can, but often have questions of their own: “Is this child eligible for Title IV-E funding? Is the placement going to be funded by the state or the county? How much work will I have to do to plan for this child's reunification with the family?”

While no one can answer all the questions a child may have, a recent symposium addressed all the steps in the process for removing a child from home – an “out of home placement,” or OOH placement for short.

The OOH Placement Symposium brought judges, referees, court administrators, friend of the court staff, and State Court Administrative Office (SCAO) staff together with staff of the Department of Human Services (DHS). These people, with expertise in child support, foster care, child protective services, funding, and juvenile justice, shared insights about what to do for an OOH placement, what information they need, and how to get it.

Symposium participants learned about every step in the removal process, from the initial complaint about potential abuse and neglect to the petition for removal. They also learned about the steps courts must take to ensure funding, and the complex issues that Office of Child Support (OCS) and friend of the court staff face when determining who should receive child support payments based on the child's placement. Also discussed was how to redirect any existing court-ordered obligation to reimburse that funding stream.

Participants included the DHS staff that will help design a new computer system to track out-of-home placements. Requirements for this new program (currently called Mi-SACWIS, for the Michigan Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System) were discussed, including the need for interaction with the Michigan Child Support Enforcement System (MiCSES) and other systems that may be affected.

Attendees rated the symposium high on a survey conducted a week after the symposium. Several comments indicated that the best solution was for courts to act locally, with friend of the court and family division staff setting up regular meetings with DHS foster care, child protective services, and OCS staff to discuss local barriers and ways around them. A 30-minute webinar, “[Avoiding an Out-of-Money Experience: How to Maximize Funding for Out-of-Home Placements](#),” sums up the symposium's discussions.

The SCAO can aid any courts interested in establishing local interagency groups. Contact us at 517-373-5975 for assistance. ■

# Show Me the Money!

## How One Court Improved Collections

By Dan Dwyer



Court Administrator, 22nd Circuit Court (Washtenaw County)

Collections Coordinator Pat Burgett may not have the dance moves of Cuba Gooding, Jr. or the pretty smile of Tom Cruise, but this guy continues to show us the money! Thanks in large part to our one-man court collections department, we have increased annual collections by almost \$300,000—at no increased cost to the funding unit and during one of the most depressed economies of the last 50 years.

The story of this accomplishment begins in the spring of 2008, when, in the face of ever-decreasing revenue streams, the Washtenaw County Trial Court established a Court Revenue Committee, including representatives of our Prosecutor's Office, Public Defender Office, County Treasurer's Office, and County Administration. We evaluated our admittedly limited collection efforts and the resulting revenue that flows into the county general fund. Our primary emphasis was on felony cases, but we also focused on fees assessed in probate and juvenile delinquency matters. We spent several months evaluating our court cost and attorney fee structures and the limited opportunities we offered court "customers" to pay their financial obligations to the court. In the end, we made the following recommendations, all of which were approved by the bench:

- Increase court cost assessments in felony and juvenile delinquency matters.
- Increase attorney fee assessments in felony matters.
- Work with the County Treasurer to implement credit card use in all divisions.
- Increase adoption study fees.
- Shift entire criminal justice system focus to a "pay at the time of assessment" culture as is required by court rule.

Before 2008, the court relied solely on the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) Probation Department for the enforcement of court-ordered financial assessments in felony cases. But in 2008, the court created a collection coordinator position within the court administrator's office; the court eliminated a vacant juvenile probation officer position, so there was no cost to the funding unit. The collection coordinator's sole focus would be the collection of revenue—primarily in felony cases, but also in a limited number of juvenile delinquency cases. We were fortunate to hire retired MDOC Probation Officer Patrick Burgett as our one-man collections department. The results have been remarkable:

| Year  | Total Court Revenue Kept by County |   |
|---|------------------------------------|---|
| 2008 (base year)                            | \$517,590                          |   |
| 2009 (1 <sup>st</sup> full year of program) | \$670,574                          |  30% over 2008 |
| 2010 (2 <sup>nd</sup> full year of program) | \$772,460                          |  15% over 2009 |

And our 2011 year-to-date collections through the end of November are \$46,639 higher than the 2010 figures.

So just how did we do it? Here's some commentary directly from Pat:

The most important attribute, if one is to achieve any success in collecting, is to stay on top of things. My experience dictates that it is crucial to keep on top of payments. Most defendants will make regular payments, but many need reminders. If someone misses a payment I send them a notice of the amount due and include a payment deadline. The notice also advises them that a failure to pay this amount by this date will lead to a show cause. I estimate that 20 percent will pay the directed amount.

If the payment is not made, I will schedule a show cause. Before doing this, I will attempt to make contact with the defendant by phone. I advise the defendant of the date to appear in court and provide the payment amount that will lead to a dismissal. I also attach a letter to the show cause summons that again provides an amount to pay for a dismissal of the show cause. Again, I estimate that 20 percent pay before stepping into court. Another 15 percent negotiate a settlement with me on their court date. This settlement generally will consist of a one- or two-week adjournment, with a dismissal upon payment of the arrearage.

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## Show Me the Money!

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I am stern, but fair and consistent in setting a realistic plan for payment. And I make it clear to defendants that I will take action if they do not meet their part of the bargain. This is particularly important when dealing with the segment of criminal population that resorts to crime as a means of satisfying their need for a challenge. The proceeds of the crime are secondary to getting away with it. These are the individuals who spend a great deal of time and effort in manipulating others. They strongly resent being held accountable and will provide non-stop excuses and rationales for their shortcomings.

Success in collections is directly related to the participation of the local bench. We would not have achieved this level of success without their commitment and leadership.

To learn more about the collections program, contact Pat Burgett at 734-222-9531. ■



## Interactive Video Technology and the Courts

*By Jill Booth, Trial Court Services Management Analyst*

Interactive video hearings not only save time and taxpayer dollars—they also just became a lot easier to schedule, for cases involving a Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) prisoner.

MDOC has implemented a process by which courts may simply send an e-mail to [MDOCWRIT@michigan.gov](mailto:MDOCWRIT@michigan.gov) that includes the court caption, date of the proceeding, type of proceeding, judge, and case number, and MDOC Central Records Division (CRS) will process the request. No writ is required. CRS will provide the phone number and extension the court will need to call to connect to the video conference and also update the court if there are any changes to that information, such as an inmate's relocation to another facility.

Interactive video technology, known as IVT, has also been used to conduct parole hearings, plea motions, depositions, attorney-client conferences, visitation, remote witness testimony, delinquency postdispositional progress reviews, bail bond reviews, and initial mental health involuntary treatment hearings.

Indeed, IVT has exploded in popularity as the courts find more and more uses for this time-saving technology. As Kevin M. Oeffner, administrator of the 6<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court, observes, "Interactive video technology is reshaping how the courts do business." (Oakland County Bar Association *Laches*, February 2011 issue.)

The Michigan Supreme Court first authorized use of communications equipment in court proceedings in 1985, when the Court adopted Michigan Court Rule (MCR) 2.402. Back then the rule was probably most often used to allow a hearing, conference, or deposition to take place by telephone conference call. More than 20 years later, the Court authorized IVT for arraignments and specified hearings in delinquency proceedings, child protective proceedings, and probate matters (see MCR 6.006, MCR 3.904, and MCR 5.738a). In addition, under Administrative Order (AO) 2007-1, courts can adopt local administrative orders (LAO) allowing them to use video technology in other proceedings not covered by those court rules. AO 2007-1 states that "[t]he goal of the expanded use of IVT is to promote efficiency for the court and accessibility for parties while ensuring that each party's rights are not compromised." Both the 6<sup>th</sup> (Oakland) and 9<sup>th</sup> (Kalamazoo) Circuit Courts have LAOs that authorize the use of IVT for additional proceedings in juvenile and abuse/neglect cases, including emergency removal hearings and preliminary hearings.

IVT saves time and expense, promotes safety, minimizes the need for additional court and law enforcement personnel, and still fully protects the rights of the parties. It also allows judges to expedite the cases before them while maintaining the integrity of court proceedings. IVT is here to stay.

Interested in learning more? Contact Jill Booth at 517-373-3756. ■



# Safe Havens Grant Money

Mary Lovik, J.D. and Tiffany Martinez, L.M.S.W. of the Michigan Domestic Violence Prevention & Treatment Board provided much of the information in this article.



Need funding for supervised parenting time and safe exchange programs? Consider encouraging your city or county to apply for a Safe Havens Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Program Grant from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office on Violence Against Women. Safe Havens grants support programs for supervised visitation and safe exchange of children in domestic relations cases involving domestic or dating violence, child abuse, sexual assault, or stalking.

The Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) offers both development grants and continuation grants. Local units of government (cities, counties, townships, or other general-purpose political subdivisions of a state) are eligible to apply. Continuation grants are awarded to current grantees whose funding cycle will come to an end as the new award period begins. Development grants are 36-month awards given to applicants who have not received funding before or whose funding has lapsed. In FY 2011, Safe Havens grants ranged from \$400,000 for a three-year development project with one visitation site to \$650,000 for a three-year continuation project with three sites. OVW plays a substantial role in shaping and monitoring all grant projects.

The Safe Havens program requires collaborative work involving three core partners: a program providing supervised visitation and safe exchange services, a local court, and a faith- or community-based nonprofit, nongovernmental domestic violence or sexual assault victim service organization. Other community participants may include batterer intervention service providers, law enforcement agencies, children's protective services, responsible fatherhood organizations, and other social service agencies. Grantees function as the project lead, and are responsible for overseeing the program and its finances. Grantees and their partners are required to participate in training sponsored by OVW.

To be eligible, applicants must demonstrate expertise in domestic violence or sexual assault. Grants may be used to enhance services, staff, and security, as well as to train supervised visitation center employees and volunteers. OVW requires that any fees the supervised visitation center charges for its programs and services be based on the recipients' income level, unless a court orders otherwise. Successful grant applicants will also demonstrate that the supervised visitation center has adequate security and adheres to guidelines adopted by the OVW; see <http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/docs/guiding-principles032608.pdf>.

Some activities – research projects, physical modifications to buildings, therapeutic visitation, parent education programs, batterer intervention programs, and individual and group or family counseling – are ineligible for Safe Havens grants. In addition, OVW strongly discourages grant recipients from certain practices (such as alternative dispute resolution) as a response to domestic violence, on the grounds that they may increase the risk of violence.

To obtain more information about a Safe Havens grant, visit <http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/> and <http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/docs/fy2011-supervised-visitation.pdf>. OVW usually begins soliciting grants by January; applicants must submit a letter of intent by early March, with the final deadline in mid-March. Please note that these dates are tentative and are based on previous years' application schedules; potential applicants are encouraged to routinely check the OVW website for the 2012 solicitation information by visiting <http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov/open-solicitations.htm>.

Interested in learning more? Grand Traverse, Ingham, Jackson, and Livingston Counties are all current grant recipients, or you may contact Tiffany Martinez at [martinez3@michigan.gov](mailto:martinez3@michigan.gov). ■



# Juvenile Recidivism Down, Youth Confidence Up, Thanks to Otsego Court's Youth Fitness Academy

*By Vicki Courterier, Court Administrator  
46th Circuit Court, Otsego County*

An Otsego County fitness program for juvenile offenders is not only showing young people the way toward better health – it's also cutting recidivism rates for the county's delinquent youth.

Kyle, a "graduate" of Otsego County's Youth Fitness Academy, probably speaks for many of the young participants when he says, "When I first came to the fitness academy, I thought it was the stupidest thing I could have done."

But the experience changed him for the better: "I started improving, losing weight, and I started to enjoy it. I would tell other kids to go for it. To me, it was the best thing I could have done."

Youth Fitness Academy (YFA), which is modeled on a similar program by Judge Thomas LaCross in Alpena, was started in spring 2010 by Judge Michael K. Cooper. The after-school program features team building exercises, physical fitness training, health education, and positive adult role models. YFA is offered free of charge to court-ordered juveniles, aged 13-17, who are referred to the program by the Otsego County family court judge. A fitness trainer, assisted by two juvenile caseworkers, facilitates the nine-week program, with three sessions per week. Each class can accommodate up to 10 juveniles. Participants must have their parents' consent and must also sign a contract, stating that they understand the program's conditions and the consequences if they violate those rules. YFA takes place two to three times per year, depending on the number of referrals.

The program's objectives include raising health awareness, increasing self-respect and respect for others, improving physical fitness, and reducing recidivism.

Trainer Wesley Smith, a former U.S. Army and CrossFit-certified physical fitness instructor, brings a unique set of skills to the program that can only be learned through years of military training and experience – a great role model for youth who need to learn not only about better health, but self-discipline. Youth gain self-esteem by doing things that they are not typically expected to do, such as long-distance running. The environment is very supportive – if a youth is unable to complete a task, the focus is shifted from failure to the positive aspect of practicing and coming back to conquer the task at a later session.



Physical fitness is assessed through the use of a baseline workout and measurements. On the first day of the program, each youth completes one minute of pushups and one minute of sit-ups, with the number of repetitions counted and recorded. Measurements are also collected of the youth's left bicep, waist, left thigh, and weight. All of these measurements are recorded again at the end of the program.

A typical session begins at 3:00 p.m., with the participants riding the county bus to a county Sportsplex facility. The youth then change into the t-shirts provided by the program, fill their water bottles, and head into the training room, where they line up in their pre-assigned squads and the workout begins. Mr. Smith leads the class in stretching and low-repetition calisthenics, and then expands the workout to include running, lungeing, and other challenging activities for the next 30 minutes. If some of the youth struggle to keep up, together the group motivates the stragglers.

Next, the group is assigned a team-building exercise: for example, a tarp is placed in the middle of the room and the youth are instructed to flip it over without talking or stepping off the tarp, and within a time limit. (continued on page 10)

**"I would tell other kids  
to go for it. To me, it  
was the best thing I  
could have done.**

**- Kyle  
YFA Graduate**

## Otsego Youth Fitness Program

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The group then gets back into the pre-determined squads, repeats the stretching sequence, and discusses the session. The discussion focuses on the activity's teambuilding value and the perseverance that the participants showed during the more difficult parts of the workout. The youth are then dismissed.



In addition, the program features guest speakers – recruiters, trainers, nutritionists, and others – who stress the importance of good nutrition and a healthy lifestyle. From time to time, if the youth have been doing well as a group, the facilitators will allow them to choose and play a game or sport during one of the sessions.

The program concludes with a graduation “ceremony” on the last day. This usually involves pizza and some snacks, as well as awards earned throughout the program. The judge attends the graduation, and parents are also invited to attend.

Youth Fitness Academy gets results. In the most recent session, all participants lost weight, were more physically fit, and reduced or maintained their waist size. In addition, all of them were able to do more repetitions in both pushups and sit-ups. And recidivism rates are low; in 2010, participants’ recidivism rate was 16 percent, and in 2011, it was 22 percent.

Kate Rock, one of the participants, said the program had a lasting effect on her: “I’m a lot better at exercising, and I really got into the long-distance running. I liked the basketball and volleyball games.”

But the program is no piece of cake, she cautions: “I’d advise kids who joined the Fitness Academy to stick it out. You’ll like it a little better as time goes by.”

Judge Cooper credits “committed and enthusiastic work by the juvenile probation staff. They have made this program a success for the youth, their families, and the community,” he said.

Youth Fitness Academy has the support of the local funding unit and the community in general. While this difficult program is not for everyone, it has helped the youths who are ordered to participate, improving their appearance, self-worth, and respectfulness.



For more information, contact Wesley Smith at 989-731-0203 or [wsmith@otsegocountymi.gov](mailto:wsmith@otsegocountymi.gov). ■



## One Court of Justice Website Survey

More than 500 people took the time to complete the survey regarding the One Court of Justice Website. The responses and suggestions are being analyzed and will be valuable as we take steps to improve the One Court of Justice Website to ensure it meets the needs of its visitors.

Thank you for your feedback!

## MEDIA 101

# Take the Lead to Educate the Public About Courts

*By Marcia McBrien*

*Public Information Officer, Michigan Supreme Court*

Many people think of “public relations” as something to do *after* a reporter calls or a story breaks. And that’s unfortunate, because any organization – including courts – has opportunities to set its own public relations agenda.

At its heart, public relations is about educating the public, either directly or through the media, about your organization, its work, and its goals. Here are two Michigan Supreme Court public education programs that feature – in fact, depend on – participation by local courts.

**Court Community Connections.** Twice a year, generally in May and October, the Michigan Supreme Court goes on the road to hear oral arguments at locations other than the capital. “Court Community Connections” is designed to educate the public, particularly high school students, about Michigan’s judicial branch.

A typical event includes a luncheon with the local bar association, Supreme Court justices, and area students, followed by the oral argument. Students study the case in advance with help from local attorneys; the Supreme Court Office of Public Information provides a study guide. After the hearing, the attorneys who argued the case debrief the students. An informal reception follows, where the students have the opportunity to meet the justices.

Past “Court Community Connections” sites include Lapeer, Hastings, Saginaw Valley State University, Centreville, Cooley Law School (Auburn Hills campus), Lake Michigan College, Siena Heights University, Dearborn’s Ford Community and Performing Arts Center, and Caro.

“Court Community Connections” has been enthusiastically received, not only by our “host courts” and their local governments, but also by students, teachers, and the general public. The Supreme Court is currently seeking host courts for programs starting in October 2012.

**Michigan Adoption Day.** If your family or probate court has never participated before, consider joining the many courts who have made Michigan Adoption Day a Thanksgiving tradition. Held each year on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, Michigan Adoption Day draws attention to the children awaiting permanent homes, and to the work courts do towards that goal. Participating courts often finalize adoptions on that day and open the hearings to the public, but there are many ways to participate, including “adoption fairs” for prospective parents.

In 2011, 30 counties participated, finalizing 145 adoptions. A program at the Hall of Justice featured Chief Justice Robert Young, Governor Rick Snyder, and Department of Human Services Director Maura Corrigan, among others.

Also, this Adoption Day marked the first presentation of the Daniel J. Wright Lifetime Achievement Award, named for the former director of the State Court Administrative Office’s Child Welfare Services division. Dan Wright, the first recipient of the award, was recognized for his many contributions to child support and child welfare reform. The Wright Award will be presented each year for exemplary lifetime service to Michigan’s children and families. Look for more information on this award and the nomination process in the next issue of *Connections*.

For more information about these and other Supreme Court public outreach programs, please visit <http://courts.michigan.gov/supremecourt/Press/SpecialFeaturesIndex.htm>, or contact Barb Browne (517-373-0714 or [BrowneB@courts.mi.gov](mailto:BrowneB@courts.mi.gov)). ■

*Marcia McBrien is an attorney and the Public Information Officer of the Michigan Supreme Court. Media 101 is a regular feature of TCS Connections. If you have a media or public relations topic that you’d like to see in a future issue, e-mail Marcia at [McBrienM@courts.mi.gov](mailto:McBrienM@courts.mi.gov). You can also follow Marcia on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/CourtInfo>.*

## Just For Fun!

K X S B P C C C N D O T N X H Q X K J Q X G H M P T  
 E E T Q I X R C S M U I S O P M Y S V F R O B D Q L  
 T C N X A Y J P O T S E G O L V W Y F O G K D I X O  
 A O E Z J N V S B S S H Q L C R T Y C Q V R E S P W  
 B E M J C Y M Z T C P L A K E P D N S C M N A T L N  
 O A N S D M T T T N H M L R G J D O D Q L S V R M B  
 R D G K M P G S J A A R P E P C L L Y V L S N I P P  
 P T I T Q A Q M V Y S R I Z B I A E V H S E Y C W Z  
 H S A I V X L U N K P V R S X E M F I B T N J T M N  
 U E R Z I D S L F P K K S A T K L X J L T T Y L A A  
 C R R L J Y U X A U B E P E W M R G Y L N I L S A Q  
 X R A C C L W S G N M X E A H I A V N Y H F D S E E  
 W A H Y Y Z L N U H D K K N G I P S U I L H R B G Q  
 T T R R L F E M K H A M G B P Y K A C V J T G C T Q  
 L Z E G F D D Y T I I O I L W J E F N G U U T L G U  
 U T I U C R I C X T S M O G K T S F E F X O A Q Y E  
 X G R M T E C H N O L O G Y H P O K G Z B Y R K I C  
 P S H W R R N S N F U F N R B T H O G A W H N M G L  
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arraignments

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### Questions? Comments? Suggestions?

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